

FLU VACCINE FAQs

flu.delaware.gov

What is the flu?

The flu — also called influenza — is an illness that affects the respiratory system, which is the system that helps you breathe. It is caused by one or more viruses and can easily be spread from one person to another. Depending on the patient, the flu can cause anywhere from mild symptoms that can be treated rather easily at home to severe illness that requires hospitalization and may result in death. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms: fever or feverish chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuff nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. The best way to keep from getting the flu is to get a flu vaccine every year.

I'm healthy and never get sick, so why should I get the flu vaccine?

Getting the flu vaccine is the best way for you to fight the flu and protect yourself and those around you.

Now more than ever, it's important for every person 6 months and older to get vaccinated against the flu. This includes people who have a greater chance of getting it, people who are generally healthy, people who get the flu vaccine every year, and people who only get it sometimes or have never gotten it. Even healthy people can get the flu — and experience serious effects from it that require treatment by a health care provider, a long recovery time, or even hospitalization.

And though you may be healthy and would not have much difficulty recovering if you did get the flu, you could pass the flu on to a family member or friend who is in greater danger of getting seriously ill or even dying from it.

I know people who got the vaccine and still got the flu, so what's the point of getting vaccinated?

The flu vaccine is the best way to prevent getting the virus, but it is not a 100% guarantee that you will not get the flu. Typically, the flu vaccine protects against three to four types of the flu virus. However, if you get the vaccine and still get the flu, the vaccine will likely help your case of the flu to be milder — which may mean fewer or less severe symptoms, shorter recovery time, and the ability to treat yourself without needing to go to a health care provider or hospital. In some cases, if a person gets the flu soon after getting the vaccine, it is likely that he or she already had the virus in his or her body but hadn't developed symptoms yet.

How do I know if I am at risk of getting the flu?

Until you are vaccinated, you are at greater risk of getting the flu and passing it on to loved ones. People in the high-risk category include those 65 and older; those with underlying medical conditions such as lung disease, heart disease, neurological disorders, weakened immune system, and diabetes; pregnant women; children under age 2; African Americans and Hispanics; workers in long-term-care facilities; and essential workers having frequent interaction with the public.



What's the big deal if I do get the flu?

Each year in the U.S., the flu causes millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and tens of thousands of deaths. If you get the flu, you open yourself up to many potential health problems. You also risk exposing others to the flu, and if any of these people have health issues, they could experience severe problems from the flu. If you get the flu, you most likely will miss days at work in order to recover, and you will miss time caring for your family and doing the things you like to do in fall and winter. Lastly, now more than ever, it is important to save as many health care supplies and professionals as possible to be available on the front lines to stop COVID-19.

Is it true that the vaccine can give me the flu? What are other side effects of the flu vaccine?

No, a flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. A flu vaccine may cause mild side effects that may be mistaken for the flu, such as body aches or a sore arm where the vaccine was given. If experienced at all, these effects are usually mild and last only one or two days.

Should my children get the flu vaccine? What about my parents?

Yes, children 6 months and older should get the flu vaccine, and so should all adults. If you have a moderate or severe illness or fever, you may need to postpone getting a flu vaccine. Check with your health care provider.

Where is the best place to get the flu vaccine?

There are many places throughout Delaware where you and your family can get vaccinated for the flu. These include:

- Your health care provider's office (Some patients' medical providers are located in Federally Qualified Health Centers, such as Westside Family Healthcare, Henrietta Johnson Medical Center, or La Red Health Center)
- Pharmacies
- Division of Public Health Clinic (for uninsured or underinsured persons)
- Community flu clinics

See flu.Delaware.gov for a list of upcoming clinics.

Wouldn't it be better for me to get the flu than risk being exposed to COVID-19 by going to get a flu vaccine?

There is no need to be concerned about your safety when getting a flu vaccine. Health care providers are taking greater care than ever to make sure their locations are clean and safe, and that everyone working there takes all the necessary steps to keep you healthy during your visit. On the other hand, if you get the flu, your body may be more likely to experience serious symptoms if you do get exposed to COVID-19.



Why does COVID-19 make it more important for me to get the flu vaccine this year?

Even though the flu vaccine does not prevent you from getting COVID-19, it can play an important role in your health at this time. Plus, when you get vaccinated for the flu, you add power to Delaware's fight against COVID-19. The flu vaccine decreases the number of people who need to be treated for the flu. This means more health care supplies, resources, and professionals will be available on the front lines to fight the pandemic. By eliminating the need to visit your provider's office or be hospitalized for the flu, you help lower the risk of workers on the front lines getting sick.

If I am sick, how can I tell whether I have the flu or COVID-19?

The flu and COVID-19 have many similar symptoms. They include fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue (tiredness), sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle pain or body aches, and headaches. Other signs and symptoms of COVID-19 that are different from flu include a change in or loss of taste or smell. If you are sick, the best thing to do is call your health care provider to see if you should get tested for COVID-19 or come in for a visit.

Is it too late for me to get my flu vaccine?

If possible, we recommend getting your flu vaccine by the end of October — but if you cannot, the vaccine is still effective even if you get it in November, December, or later.

What should I do if I think I have the flu?

If you experience certain severe symptoms, you should seek medical attention right away. For adults, these include difficulty breathing, sudden dizziness, confusion, frequent vomiting, and flu-like symptoms that go away then come back with a fever and bad cough. If your child shows these symptoms, you should get him or her care right away: fast breathing or difficulty breathing, bluish skin, will not drink fluids, does not wake up or respond to you, does not want to be held, and flu-like symptoms that go away then come back with a fever and a bad cough or rash.

If you have flu symptoms that are not severe, you should still be careful to protect yourself and others. Stay away from others as much as possible — you can give someone the flu 24 hours before you show symptoms and five to seven days after you get sick. You should also stay home, get rest, drink plenty of water and clear liquids, and treat fever and coughs with medicines you can buy at the store.

In addition to getting a flu vaccine, what else can I do to protect myself and my family from the flu and COVID-19?

Practicing good hygiene is important year-round and especially during times like flu season, when viruses and germs are plentiful and more easily spread. Ways you can help prevent the spread of the flu and other illnesses include washing your hands regularly and/or using hand sanitizer; sneezing or coughing into a tissue then throwing the tissue away immediately; avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; staying home if you are sick; wearing a face covering in public; and practicing social distancing.

